

HOLISTIC ETHICS AND GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES

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1. Introduction

The global environmental crisis is fundamentally an ethical problem. It reflects also a crisis in human value system. In the contemporary global situation there are preferential value systems which people of various cultures and ethnic affiliations committed to ancient religious belief systems and practices stick to maintain. The latter component is generally called the *religious ethos*, although it is very much an integral part of an ethnic cultural milieu. Their religious belief systems also have to be seriously taken into account when we discuss finding ways and means to solve some of the human-made environmental crises on a global magnitude. The ethics of modern materialism seems to be a “worship of human pride.” Contemporary human communities world over value their own respective gains and take a certain degree of pride and glory of their own technological advancement even on their respective national banners and brand names. In this materialistic perspective of global achievements by certain world powers other things and humans are of value only in as much as they can be somehow used for achieving the targets of such global goal settings. Due to this overemphasis of reaching the competitive global marketing targets we need to acknowledge that our vicious materialistic interests of our ruthless advancement in productivity of industrial goods, we are making the Earth, our homeland and ourselves

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very sickly and neurotic. We need a new ethics that changes our role from being the controller and manipulator of the world to be its friend, servant and partner. In short, we need broaden our ethical vision and norms of application to solve the present day environmental crises from the confines of family and tribe to include nation, race and, finally, humankind. This is what is implied in applying holistic ethics and its integrative norms which take into account the specific religious ethos of various peoples and communities which constitute the so-called “Global Village” where everybody should know and respect each other’s ancestral belief systems, values and cultural identity traits which each community honours as its own great heritage. Can we solve our contemporary environmental problems following a set of universally acceptable holistic norms of ethical behaviour? This is the central question here under discussion to which I would like to contribute from my ecological awareness, reflections, and experience gained from my action programs.

2. Ecological and Holistic Ethical Postulates

In this discussion, the ecological postulate is to extend the ethical domain not only to all forms of life but to the environment itself. Eco-centric view of this earth helps us to see life-systems as a web of interdependent unit wholes and, hence, individual organisms are seen and respected as intrinsically beneficial to each other. However, our ecological perspective of Nature as the womb where life takes shape needs to be esteemed holistically. Eco-centrism does not confine our ethical sensibility to an organism as such but extends it to the entire environment. An organism and its environment constitute a continuum. An organism is unintelligible in isolation from its environment; environment is part of its definition. What holistic ethics ultimately implies is to maintain universal kinship and respect towards everything, every form of life-systems, and their life-saving environment as its *sine qua non sitz im Leben*, i.e., indispensable life-sustaining setup.

The foundational holistic ethical postulate is that Nature is a moral order where there is not only struggle for one’s own life but also struggle for the life of all, including their protective habitats. The reproductive bio-mechanism is for the preservation of the species. However, any life-system receives in assimilation and gives out in reproduction. There is an aspect of self-sacrifice in reproduction, and it is the universal law of life. According to the Indian Vedic insights, the initial impetus of creation by the Supreme One is said to be *kāma* (love) and that demanded a *yajña*

(sacrifice) on the part of the Self-Existent. *Agre kṛma asti* – in the beginning there was love (*Ṛgveda* X,129,4). The culmination of creative evolution is also love and its most conspicuous expression is represented in a human mother’s giving her own life-sap in the form of breast-milk to her child. This motherly love is the result of a living process of self-sacrifice, rather than an act of simple benevolence. This is typified in the “bio-genetics” of Mother Earth as well. Thus, love must have been ingrained in the Nature’s moral order from its origin and the Nature preserves it all through the various stages of her evolution and progress. Hence, there is a moral order in this universe, where love is shared in responsible parentage at varied degrees of its manifestation from lower species to human beings. Any technocratic or mechanistic or industry favouring interference with this rhythm of the moral order of Nature and her life-supporting habitats will lead ultimately into the destruction and extinction of the living organisms in certain areas of our endangered planet, and this destructive process in due course will affect human survival as well. This is the reason why we need think in terms of a holistic ethical dealing with all living organisms in their due linking with all other neighbours and co-habitants of various eco-systems of our homely planet.

Just as beauty attracts and goodness elicits love, the sense of the value of life must generate in us a sense of duty to help the continuity of the life-systems to survive in proper living environments, the most conducive of which is our own human sweet homes, where love blossoms in the most endearing ways of affection, concern, charity, understanding, forgiving and forgetting attitudes towards the individual members. It is at our homes that life-sharing takes place in its most intensity of love (*kṛma*) which enables the sharing of generative drives of the couples to give a new life-form, a child. In an analogical manner, we have to respect Nature as our bigger home where all life-systems can co-exist and survive with mutual help and support enabling a harmonious living style for all beings, where human beings take the responsibility of securing the right of existence and survival of all other lower beings. In order to act on this higher human responsibility, we have to apply the norms of holistic ethical attitudes to all creatures, which basically imply the acceptance of each fauna and flora as integral constituents of our planetary habitat which have their right of existence and growth as designed by the Creator. Every living organism is a link in the web of the whole life-system and a constant

concern for their safety and security must be the duty (*dharma*) of all those who are on the fast track of industrialization and consequent dangers of degradation of the living environment, pollution, contamination of the life-saving sources of Nature's gifts such as water, air, greeneries, sunshine as well as the inter-space expanse of the universe. We have to bear in mind a broken link, however small it is, that causes damage to the whole web of life system and gives an alarm of a gradual breaking of the whole vital organic structure of our planet.

The anthropocentric ethics, as witnessed in the past, honours only human beings and their income-generating and trading interests while exploiting all other beings to serve this economic target almost exclusively, and not their life-sustaining habitats. This ethical exclusivism makes the humankind blind to Nature and her sublime functions and purposes. The economically motivated industrialists of today consider Nature as a depository of minerals and forestry resources which have to be exploited at all costs for industrial purposes. This exploiting tendency of industrialists stunts humanity because it does not know the genuine human transcendence – an overarching care for humans as well as their life-sustaining environments. Joining hands with many ecologists of today I feel like sensing that human greatness may not show itself anymore in the domination of Nature, but in the capacity to go beyond its egoistic aggressiveness to the maintenance-service of our own home, this planet, the house of God and of humans, as well as of angels and other cosmic guardian spirits.

3. Need of an “Ethics of Sustainable Development”

Environmental ethics is possible only if we can re-evaluate the global economic system. Progress understood in economic and materialistic terms is degrading the environment. The economic growth rate we achieve comes at the cost of extensive environmental damage and high health costs to people and other species. The myth of progress and its industrial assault on the planet amounts to subversion of the evolutionary propensities of the earth. To bring local and global economy within the holistic ecological principles we need to cultivate a taste for right livelihood and general wellbeing. It calls for a counter cultural revolution that will accept a shift of emphasis from material acquisition to inner spiritual growth. It implies bringing back what we have banished from economics, namely, the “ethics of sustainable development.” There are ethical challenges before

economics such as equity, justice, and the wellbeing of the planetary community.

The challenge before eco-friendly development is to replace growth with sustainable progress. A materialist philosophy of life with an ethics of consumerism motivated by mere profit-oriented market economy does not fit into a system of sustainability in which everyone in this world has to be cared for. The world of limited resources and the idea of unlimited economic expansion are incompatible. In a finite environment, there is no way other than to limit production and consumption if we want to avert the breakdown of Nature's benevolent systems. Human desires are infinite and infinitude can be achieved only in the spiritual realm and never in the material realm. Simpler lifestyle can reduce human impact on the environment; it can also ensure a less violent society.

A planned controlling of excessive consumerism will certainly help maintain Nature's self-regulative capacity. By following some strict eco-friendly regulatory ethical methodology in industrial productivity we contribute towards enduring economic progress for the benefit of all the inhabitants of our planet. Thinking along the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, regarding the use of our resources for the “needs of humans and not for their greed,” we may have to promote productivity to meet the basic needs of the larger low income sections of our nation in contrast to satisfying the greed of a few multinational business magnets and monopoly holders. This preferential option on the national planning schemes would be give rise to a good economic planning on the right line of sustainable development and growth in the productivity lines of our nation. Thus, sparing and conserving the Nature's resources also for our future generations, while not consuming the whole of Nature's blessings by our own present generations, will be a great gesture of generosity on our part, shown towards the future of humankind; such reserving of our resources for the future of our generation will ensure sustainable development; this is one of the pivotal points of holistic eco-friendly ethics which will promote our nation's sustainable economic development.

4. Eco-Holism: A New Configuration for Environmental Management

“Eco-holism” is a new configuration for environment management and happy life; it also provides a new way of solving problems created by ecological exploitations and disasters. It is a process of integrating all ‘*holons*’ – ‘unit wholes’ – in the spectrum of the wholeness or totality of a

system, and viewing the whole as expectantly anticipated in each unit-whole. It is like viewing our whole body as one configuration of a number of units or parts, each of which is complete in itself but incomplete without its relatedness to the whole body-configuration. It is also like the symbol of “the wine and its branches” (Jn. 15:4-6) used by Jesus Christ to explain the dynamics of the Christian life to be lived in close intimacy and communion with Jesus, the main trunk of the wine, in view of achieving maximum effectiveness in the activities of his disciples. This is generally known as the holistic vision of life lived in inter-connectivity with the mainline source of life, the life divine passing through the main trunk as well as transfused into all braches equally and proportionately for the healthy survival and productivity of the wine as visualized by Jesus in his parable. Eco-holistic vision of life, therefore, is fundamentally a new configuration of all components of Natural resources used for sustainable development and healthy management of production lines.

In viewing the totality of a system, no part is to be taken as a disconnected or discrete entity but as an integral unit contributing its own specific elements towards the building up of the whole system, whatever it is. Every unit in itself is a ‘unit-whole’ (*holon*), defining itself having a role to play of its own, while contributing towards the total function of the total system as one organic whole. In other words, it is equal to say that we all need our own specific holistic visions of realities and their related issues in order to propose correct remedial steps in solving the problems arising from actual situations of human life which is connected to the life-systems of numerous other fellow beings and creatures. This is called a holistic ethical approach to realities and their problem solutions both for their building up and for their reparatory works, when systems fail to function, and when one or the other component gets damaged or worn out.

The holistic vision of life is very much foundational in our Indian religious ethos and culture, consisting of *Darśanas* (philosophical insights), *Brahmajijñāsa* (theological investigations), and *Yoga Sādhana*s (ways of spirituality). Viewing anything in its wholeness first and, then, going to its details to realize the wholeness of what is perceived and heard is the Indian method of knowledge described in a graded ascendancy as *śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana* (i.e., listening-perception, reflection, and realization). This is what is generally known as ‘totality perception’. Certain qualifications, like *pūrṇam* (fullness), *samanvayam* (integral), *samagram* (whole), *samuchayam* (harmonious), etc., are characteristically holistic

expressions in Indian managerial ethics; in fact, they were applied right from the time of Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* and Manu's *Dharmaśāstra*. They have to be applied as relevant in eco-holistic ethics to make sense for an integral approach to productivity and progress.

This holistic vision of life and its application for solving life-related problems holistically is more effectively used in theoretical sciences, especially in the areas of life-sciences such as *ayurveda* and such other natural medical sciences which are integrally connected to the supporting bio-systems of Nature, where it is known as 'holistic medicine' and 'holistic treatment'. In psychological and neurological sciences, it is called 'holistic counselling', which is now-a-days applied for treating mentally challenged patients.

There are 'holistic approaches' proposed to solve the problems affecting persons and their interactions in managerial settings. Such approaches finally succeed in solving problems with amazing results even in the personnel management of big firms and companies. Holistic inspirational thoughts such as "Human beings are here, handle with care," "Give respect, take respect," "I feel confident since you are here," etc., are commonly seen fixed on the entrance of conference halls and council rooms of management establishments.

Every approach holistically conceived has an organic and network coordination as that of our human body, by targeting a unified common function to realize the benefit of the whole body as its common good, while the particular functions of each and all parts of the same system are coordinated keeping the function of each organ as important as that of the whole body, and as integral as every other organ or unit of the whole system. Therefore, neglect of even apparently insignificant part of the body is unacceptable when the total functioning of the whole body is considered important for the wellbeing of the whole system. It is said that the strength of a chain rests on its weakest link. Hence, in a holistic approach to solving problems of any system, much care and precaution should be taken to save the weakest links, persons or incidents as the case may be, apparently unnoticed by uncritical minds in the management of persons and projects.

5. Holistic Ethical Values for Happy Life

Ecologists, like Ken Wilber, discover three types of values in Nature which if holistically coordinated contribute much to make our life happier than otherwise. They are: (1) *ground value*, (2) *intrinsic value*, and (3) *extrinsic*

value. Accordingly, all ‘*holons*’ (everything is a ‘*holon*’ as it is part and whole at the same time), as they are manifestations or expressions of the whole system, have ground value. Inasmuch as all things participate in the interconnected whole as parts of the whole they possess a ground value. Besides being a part, every *holon* has its own relative wholeness or depth and so possesses an intrinsic value. Its depth is valuable as it incorporates and enfolds aspects of the whole cosmos. Both an atom and an ape, as manifestations of the Cosmic Spirit, have equal ground value but as both differ in depth wholeness also differ in intrinsic value. Every *holon* is part of some other *holon* and, hence, it has extrinsic or instrumental value, i.e., value for others. Atoms have lot of instrumental value as they are constituent parts of so many wholes. As every *holon* is a whole/part, intrinsic value and extrinsic value are twin aspects of the same reality.

In a sequence of increasing complexity, the higher structures transcend the lower but include aspects of the lower. The higher depends on the lower, though the former transcends the latter in its depth dimension. If the molecules are destroyed, then cells and organisms are destroyed. The destruction of the physiosphere means the destruction of the biosphere as well. This interconnection or interrelationship means that everything has its place, relevance, and value. Wilber’s environmental ethics flows from the fact of transcendence and inclusion. Wilber says:

Because human beings contain matter and life and mind, as components in their own make up, then of course, we must honour all these *holons*, not only for their own intrinsic worth, which is the most important, but also because they are components in our own being, and destroying them is literally suicidal for us.¹

Freya Mathews, similarly, identifies three levels of values which she calls, (1) *background value*, (2) *intrinsic*, and (3) *instrumental value*. She derives background value from the intrinsic value of the cosmos. The cosmos as a whole is considered as a self-maintaining self and as such possessing intrinsic value. Just as every part of the human body is important, every part of the universal self too is important. The parts inherit a background value from the value of the whole. So she observes:

Our world is an expression of selfhood, of a cosmic will-to-exist, and as such has a meaning, and a value, that would not attach to a purely ‘blind’ and contingent world. There is in this sense an

¹Wilber, *Up from Aden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, 13.

element of affirmation and fulfilment in the existence of every physical thing. Even the rocks call forth a certain reverence in the light of their participation in this great act of self-realization on the part of the cosmos.²

Then, there is the second level of intrinsic value in individual selves or self-maintaining systems. Like background value, it is objective, absolute, and is inbuilt into selfhood. The third level of instrumental value applies when something promotes the wellbeing of something else. Instrumental value, though it is relative to a particular organism's usefulness, has an objective quality. Natural entities are to be respected for their own sake instead of regarding them only as means. We lose friends when we use them as means; we lose the pristine quality of Nature by regarding it only as a means.

6. Scientific Bases for Holistic Ethics and Human Life

Quantum physics rewrote the classical physics' conception of a static, fixed container like universe with ultimately separable constituents. According to the organic/holistic/ecological worldview emerging from modern physics, *the universe is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as patterns of a cosmic process.*

The world is a dynamic web of relations with its own overall self-consistency and that compels us to recognize that consciousness is, after all, an essential aspect of the universe. According to G. Bateson, the author of *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (1988), the mental process is always a sequence of interactions between parts.³ The explanation of mental phenomena must always reside in the organization and interaction of multiple parts. The mental function is immanent in the interaction of differentiated parts, and the 'wholes' are constituted by such combined interaction of differentiated parts. Life and mind are inbuilt in the dynamics of self-organization. Human individual minds are only subsystems of larger manifestations of mind at social and ecological levels. There are levels of mind corresponding to the stages of evolution. When the mind-matter

²Freya Mathews, *The Dancing of Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*, New York: Bantam Books, 1980, 281.

³G. Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, New York: Bantam Books, 1988, 99.

dichotomy lingers on, it is difficult to see the world as having any mental wave to qualify it as ‘mindful’. But in the stratified order of nature, individual human minds are embedded in the larger minds of social and ecological systems, and these are integrated into the planetary mental system – the mind of *Gaia* – which, in turn, must participate in some kind of universal or cosmic mind.⁴

Fritjof Capra sees no hitch in associating this cosmic mind with the traditional idea of God. As for Erich Jantisch, God is “the mind of the universe.” The God-idea does not stand above or outside of evolution as an ethical norm, but it is placed in true mysticism unfolding into a self-realization of evolution.⁵ As Dubley Young comments, the scientific world is, at last, coming to see the intuition of the ancients. He observes that when a physicist says that matter doesn’t exist, and is *really* just a mistaken epiphany of the energy-gods, he has almost come full circle, very close to the primitive animist who knows that everything is alive, and derives its liveliness from the winds of *pneuma* that blows through it.⁶ For George Wald, physical and psychical are complementary aspects of the same reality. His views are serious and thought provoking. He says:

If I say the stuff of the world is mind-stuff, that has a metaphysical ring. But if I say that ultimate reality is expressed in the solutions of the equations of quantum mechanics, quantum electro-dynamics, and quantum field theory – that sounds like good, modern physics. Yet what are these equations? Indeed, what is mathematics, but mind-stuff? Virtually, the ultimate is mind-stuff and for that reason deeply mysterious... The universe of space and time and elementary particles and energies, is then an *avatara*, the materialization of primal mind.⁷

The new physics seems to chart a new course entering the domain of mysticism. Appreciating the Vedantic position of the identity of energy (*akti*) and consciousness (*cit*), Michael Talbot says: “Matter is condensed energy of *cit* or consciousness itself. As it is written in *Muḍaka Upaniḍad*,

⁴Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point*, New York: Bantam Books, 1982, 317.

⁵Erich Jantisch, *The Self-Organizing Universe*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980, 308.

⁶Erich Jantisch, *Origins of the Sacred: The Ecstasies of Love and War*, London: Abacus, 1993, xxiv.

⁷George Wald, “Life and Mind in the Universe,” Paper Presented in the Seminar of NCERT, New Delhi, February 1987.

by energy, consciousness (Brahman or the unbroken Ultimate Reality) is massed; from that *matter* is born *life* and *mind* and the *worlds*.”⁸

Further, the gospel of unity and interconnectedness is echoed in the words of Gary Zukav, who thinks that the philosophy of physics borders on the philosophy of Buddhism, which is a philosophy of enlightenment. Zukav says that the vital aspect of the enlightened state is the experience of an all-pervading unity. ‘This’ and ‘that’ are no longer separate entities. They are different forms of the same thing. Everything is a manifestation of *That* which is beyond words, beyond even space and time. Probably, the dominant chorus within the scientific fraternity is that the cosmic process is a matter of chance and the notion of purpose is a question of individual predilection. Thus, wrote Richard Dawkins:

Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind... It does not plan for the future... It has no vision... If it can be said to play the role of a watchmaker in nature, it is the blind watchmaker.⁹

Steven Weinberg, another great physicist, strikes a similar chord, when he says,

We like to think that we are very special and that we are not the result of a series of accidents reaching back to the “big bang” but on the contrary we were within the cosmic plan. We don’t realize that this homely earth is a tiny part in a really hostile universe and is destined to perish in extreme cold or heat. “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”¹⁰

There are also critics like Riedel questioning the above theories of chance-mutations. Can chance explain everything? Can an orderly universe be the result of mere chance mutations? In fact, chance and necessity drive forward the evolution of organisms. Prospects of improvement lie in the realm of accidents, but its success, by necessity, depends on how well organism adapts to the novelty. When something is selected from the realm of

⁸Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and New Physics*, cited in Jitatmananda in *Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1993, 2:65.

⁹Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Essex: Lingman Scientific and Technical, 1986, 5.

¹⁰S. Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*, London: Harper Collins, 1993, 149.

possibilities it enters the realm of necessity. Restriction of accident will increase the prospect that law will be successfully invented during evolution, restriction of accident leads to a channelization of possibilities and to fixation. According to David Bohm, chance and necessary causal interconnections are two sides of every natural process. Neither causal laws nor laws of chance can be basic and final, rather they are approximations. He says:

Just as a causal law can arise as a statistical approximation to the average behaviour of a large aggregate of elements undergoing random fluctuations, a law of chance can arise as a statistical approximation to the effects of a large number of causal factors undergoing essentially independent motions.¹¹

7. Philosophical Holism: Teleological in Nature of Life Systems

One of the most important features of holism is teleology or purposefulness of each unit (*holon*) of a life-system functioning for the good of the whole system and its allied subsidiaries. Human beings reason out things and execute plans with knowledge and will. The purpose behind our actions is known to us. But animals act for their respective biological ends, though they do not intellectually know their actions and the purpose of the actions. They follow their biological instincts. In this way, the whole Nature is acting for a purpose, for the sake of something. In the case of nonliving things, teleology/purpose is inbuilt into their mechanism and it is manifested in the laws of Nature.

The structure of something is better understood only when we know what it is for. Why should leaves be generally flat? An analysis of their chemical composition will not yield the right answer. The answer lies in the reason for the flatness. Organs of plants and animals are like tools which are designed to carry out certain tasks. No organ can be properly understood without considering its purpose or the special job it does. Nature's wisdom equips every being in such a way that it can find it for itself. This is equivalent to saying that Nature is purposive all the way.

Paul Davies holds that nature is too subtle, too profound. We can scratch the surface of reality, but we will always leave beneath vast, unfathomable depths of mystery. All we can hope to do is to probe a few of the principles which administer the cosmos and marvel at the beauty of it all.

¹¹David Bohm, *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959, 143.

Our scope of vision is far too narrow for us to grapple with deep issues of meaning and purpose.¹²

Every advance in fundamental physics leads to yet another face of order. The very success of scientific method depends on the laws inbuilt in the functioning of the universe. Logically, the universe does not have to be orderly and harmonious. We can conceive a chaotic world of haphazard activities and unstable structures. But the real world is not that way. People believe in the basic orderliness of the world. Its dependability and order are taken for granted; it has become part of our life so much so that it provokes no sense of wonder. Concerning Weinberg's view that the world seems pointless, Paul Davies reacts:

I think that in part it is a case of being unable to see the wood for the trees. A professional scientist is so immersed in unravelling the laws of nature that he forgets how remarkable it is that there are these laws in the first place. Because science presupposes rational laws, the scientist rarely stops to think about why these laws exist. Just as a crossword addict assumes without thinking that there is an answer to the puzzle, so the scientist rarely questions the fact that there are rational answers to his scientific enquiries.¹³

As there are laws of nature, there is a certain consistency in the world; and consistency at the basic level is that the world continues to exist. There is a spatial order like the arrangement of the solar system and temporal order in the regularity of natural processes like the vibration of an atom, day and night, summer and winter. A living organism is a highly ordered complex structure. The delicate and intricate mechanism like the human eye is superbly designed for the purpose of sight. Millions of highly specialized cells perform peculiar functions in cooperation. Haphazard collection of cells cannot do the job of an eye. No physicist would seriously believe that his subject matter was, in fact, a disorderly and meaningless mass, and that the laws of physics represented no real advance of our understanding. It would be ludicrous to suppose that all science is merely an artificial invention of the mind bearing no more relation to reality than constellation “Pisces” bears to real fish.¹⁴

¹²Paul Davies, *Superforce: The Search for a Grand Unified Theory of Nature*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985, 222.

¹³Davies, *Superforce*, 222.

¹⁴Davies, *Superforce*, 237.

8. Holistic Orderliness in Nature and Life-Systems

Physical sciences presuppose laws of nature, and these laws, in turn, imply order and purpose. No science is possible without the laws that govern the world. As Riedel says, the order of this world is one of its basic characteristics, product of the unfolding of natural laws. Order is the condition for understanding the Universe. It forms our thought and practice as a consequence of the patterns in all living structure.

Science attempts to explain the world. But we don't stop with science. As Paul Davies puts it further, though science may explain the world, we still have to explain science. The laws which enable the universe to spontaneously come into being seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design; the universe must have a purpose, and the evidence of modern physics suggests strongly that the purpose includes us as well. Science, as it cannot explain all facets of reality, could be supplemented by the richness of human experience. As Pius XII said, "Only human experience taken in its widest sense can uncover, in their infinite variety, all the magnitude, all the possible laws of matter; be teachers eager to reveal creation's beauty, its power, its perfection, and to bring your fellowmen to delight in them."¹⁵

According to the systems theory, the central characteristic that underlies the dynamics of evolution is creativity rather than adaptation. If evolution can be explained by adaptation alone then it would be difficult to see how living forms ever evolved beyond the level of blue-green algae, which are well-adapted to the environment and have proved their reproductive and survival capacities. The story of evolution is its dynamics of self-transcendence.

9. The Holistic Teleology of Human Life

Human beings find the possibility of reaching higher levels which are self-exceeding. They have an innate urge to go beyond the present level of being. This ever-present unfailing human aspiration, says Sri Aurobindo, is a sure sign of nature's will for a higher way to fulfilment, the emergence of a greater status. An integral transformation is the integral aim of the Being in Nature; this is the inherent sense of her universal urge for self-transcendence.¹⁶

¹⁵Cited in Paul Chauchard, *Man and Cosmos: Scientific Phenomenology in Teilhard de Chardin*, New York: Herder & Herder, 1965, 192.

¹⁶See Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth*, trans. Noel Linndsay, Wilkes Barre: Dimension Books, 1965, 67, 727.

9.1. A Sense of Communion with Nature and Communion with the “Wholeness”

Humankind’s new dialogue with nature must take us to its logical conclusion, i.e., *a greater appreciation for the mystery of nature and a sense of cosmic unity, a sense of communion with all manifestations*. As Barry Lang observes, evolution is not an isolated phenomenon as we tend to think. It is a cosmic process towards cosmic consciousness and conscious participation. Lang says:

The physical universe itself is a vast intelligence concealing the unity of life – the mystery of life – from all its cosmic parts until each unit-part evolves sufficiently to realize this truth for itself. When it realizes that truth – realizes life – it is truly intelligent and that is the start of cosmic consciousness.¹⁷

Human beings can break the barriers of individuality and enter into cosmic consciousness and therein grow in the liberating feeling of oneness with all existence and see the selfsame self inhabiting the universe. Humankind in this cosmic consciousness, seeing and feeling all as oneself, would act in that sense; one would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his/her individual self with the total self, individual will with the total will, and individual action with the total action. In this cosmic consciousness, there is no conflict between the self and the world. There is no confusion as to whether to dominate the world or to be subservient to the world, or to strike a difficult balance between the individual personal destiny and the cosmic purpose. For the one who attained cosmic consciousness, says, Aurobindo:

The difficulty would not exist, since he has no ego; his cosmic individuality would know the cosmic forces and their movement and their significance as part of himself, and the Truth-Consciousness in him would see the right relation at each step and find the dynamic right expression of that relation. For, in fact, both individual and universe are simultaneous and interrelated expressions of the same transcendent Being.¹⁸

The new sensitivity radically alters our vision and enables us to see the same life-force operating everywhere. As Barry Lang suggests, the individual life

¹⁷Barry Lang, *The Origins of Man and the Universe: The Myth that Came to Life*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, 226.

¹⁸Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1969, 974.

is not an isolated, self-centred event; it is part of the life of the whole. He says:

This life that goes on and on, yet seems to end perfunctorily and witlessly in death for the individual, is not your life or my life at all but the life of the planet earth appearing sense-perceptively as force – life force. Both in living and in surviving death, we all combine like cells to form one single evolving terrestrial being. It is not the evolution of life on earth that is the point, but the evolution of our planet as that life, together with the other planets of the solar system and any other cosmic bodies and stars.¹⁹

9.2. Finding Value and Meaning in Nature and Beyond

Discovering value in nature is the present-day task as science and technology degrade nature to the level of mere resources to be exploited at will. The primal cultures, however, had greater sensitivity towards the meaning and mystery of nature and accorded the earth the status of a mother. The female earth as central to the organic cosmology was undermined by the scientific revolution and the rise of market-oriented production culture in early modern Europe almost denuded the natural attire of the feminine landscapes and turned them into junkyards for dumping industrial wastes. The ecological sensitivity, however, has reawakened interest in the values and concepts associated historically with the pre-modern organic world.²⁰

Nature, in as much as it represents a conscious self-transcending process, has value in itself. The dynamics of evolution and its progressive march reveal a potency which is a sort of ultimacy. Ultimacy as potentiality is, thus, the ontological ground of nature-as-meaning. Meaning is essentially relational. As Bernard Lonergan shows, everything finds this value and has its value ultimately in the final cause in the ground of being. The final cause, then, is the ground of value, and it is the ultimate cause of causes, for it overcomes contingency at its deepest level. Being cannot be arbitrary, and contingent being must be a reasonably realized possibility. Its possibility is grounded in the exemplary cause, its realization in the efficient cause, but its reasonableness in the final cause.

¹⁹Barry Lang, *Origin of Man and the Universe*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, 153-154.

²⁰Carolyn Merchant, *Earth Care: Women and the Environment*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 76.

From a naturalistic, “thoroughly immanent conception of the holy,” Ned Hetinger attempts to show that nature is sacred and precious and finds religious and spiritual significance in the earth. He finds meaning not beyond the world but in “an altered understanding of and relationship to this earth.” “Our encounter with nature, its majesty and magnificence, elicits a sense of awe in us and the earth is revealed as a holy place. One’s natural response, then, is to love this earth intensely. The awesome power of the world can teach us humility and open our eyes to see that after all we are not masters of the world. Being brought into existence and shaped by this earth, humans are ‘earthlings’.” Gary Snyder eloquently puts it as follows:

But how could we be, were this not for this planet that provided our very shape? Two conditions – gravity and a liveable temperature range between freezing and boiling – have given us fluids and flesh. The trees we climb and the ground we walk on have given us five fingers and toes. The ‘place’ gave us far-seeing eyes. The land gave us a stride and the lake a dive. The amazement gave us our kind of mind.²¹

The earth, bubbling with life, is a miraculous event. We are surrounded by the miraculous but we take it for granted. As Wendel Berry says, we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread. We forget the greater miracle by which water (with soil and light) is turned into grapes. Thomas Berry adds to this line of thinking and suggests that the natural world is not only the *matrix* of our biological existence but also the medium of our higher values:

The natural world is the material source of our being as earthlings and the life-giving nourishment of our physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral and religious existence. The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence.²²

10. Eco-Ethics of Stewardship and Partnership

If the world negating ascetic strand in some religious traditions was to some extent responsible for maltreating and endangering our planet, an

²¹Gary Snyder, *Practice of the Wild*, New York: North Point Press, 1997, 29.

²²Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, San Francisco: Siera Club Books, 1998, 17.

ecological re-evaluation of our ethical vision can be helpful in nurturing an eco-friendly worldview. Religious perceptions sometimes tend to be dualistic and condition our ethical norms. They put the divine outside the world leading to anti-nature stance. Viewed from certain religious apocalyptic perspective, environmental ethics may be downgraded as meaningless, as this world will be ultimately destroyed by its Creator. In the traditional Indian religious perspectives, God is not only creator and preserver but also its destroyer. Hence, the three representations of the Ultimate Brahman taking creative role as *Brahma*, preservative role as *Viṣṇu* and finally consummative or destructive role as *Śiva*, who will ultimately reduce this beautiful planet into a mega-cemetery where everything will be made to rest into a *mahāpralaya*, immersion into the immensity of the Divinity of the Brahman. The biblical eschatology is also very close to this view of finally reducing and submitting the whole creation unto God where “God becomes all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). Maybe, due to this ultimate cosmic cancellation of the creation by its Creator, there is a subtle aversion to its temporary promises in the minds of many Christians. This also might have motivated certain materialistically interested industrialists to exploit this earth and its resources as much as possible for the sake of money and market in the present age and despise it as a bundle of matter to be finally renounced to get out of it for getting the so-called “eternal happiness,” which is beyond time and space, in the further shore, about which many of the contemporary big fellows in most of the nations are not concerned at all, or are not even rationally or religiously informed of. Consequently, such “big brothers” place themselves above a de-sacralized world and apparently attempt to dominate it through science and technology aiming at maximum productivity and utility for this worldly existence.

However, positive thinking in religion upholds a triple harmony between the human and the divine, person and nature, and person and person. God is the creator of the universe; creation effects an organic wholeness, a cosmic community; hence, a dichotomy between nature and religion is unwarranted. God is immanent in creation sustaining it, maintaining it and providing for its replenishment in rhythmic seasonal cycles. Concepts like incarnation and *avatāra* show God’s togetherness vis-à-vis creation. Earth is the Lord’s and is meant for all creation, and not to be set for the exclusive use of some superpowers. Christian thought recognizes the ethical teleology of all creation (Rom. 8.19- 22; 1 Cor.

15:28). Liberation is not exclusively human. Humanity is redeemed *with* the created order, not *from* it. For the philosophies of dualism, domination, and violence reflect not the divine will but the pettiness of human will and its pretended autonomy.

Human uniqueness as the crown of creation has been used as a justification to dominate the world. But actually it should be used for universal care. As ethical beings, it is our duty and privilege to be in partnership with God in his ongoing creation. The biblical image of stewardship (Genesis 2:15) attests to this human calling. Our cultural or religious metaphor of ‘*dominus*’ needs to be replaced by the new metaphor of ‘*socius*’, a friend, a friend of nature and creation, a friend who loves nature as a partner, and takes care of her as a sister or brother, like Francis of Assisi, the patron of ecology. Bearing God’s image means we participate with God in drawing out the divine potential of the world. Contemporary science itself suggests that a human person is the second creator. In quantum theory it is the observer who elicits certain properties of the atomic phenomenon.

Our eco-consciousness must be our enlightenment over the universe. It is the experience of connectedness with the entire web of life and, hence, profoundly spiritual. Matter is not the opposite of spirit; material realm and the spiritual realm are not dichotomous, but continuous. Spirit is life; its opposite is not matter but death and all that lead to death, such as oppression, injustice, and destruction of our homely habitat. Our ultimate failure as humans is to become the instrument of earth’s degradation. We have to accept responsibility for what we do. The earth is on the balance of a responsible decision of humankind either in favour of her survival or in condemnation of her annihilation. Domination satisfies human vain glory, but human fulfilment comes not from domination but from partnership and togetherness. Domination is manipulative, but partnership is mutually contributive for mutual benefit. Our sacred duty is to promote the ultimate wellbeing of the natural process from which we have emerged. A partnership ethics demands that we maintain the integrity of the earth so much so that we keep it natural, beautiful, and healthy, as God’ own image.

Life is fellow living; the universe itself reveals community. Though modern times belong to the individual and individual rights, individual must fit into the community, social as well as planetary. Rights of the person are also the rights of the planet. Human self-fulfilment, self-

realization must involve the discovery of the self as belonging to the community, the earth and the universe. Our ecological relatedness and friendliness to our planet and its numerous creatures should lead us from egocentrism to eco-centrism. A holistic environmental ethics is an adventure in the love of life for a global civilization of peace and harmony.

11. Practice of *Ahimsa* as Humane Affectionate Ways with the Nature

The central principle of holistic eco-ethics is practising non-violence towards Nature and her creatures. Non-violence (*ahimsa*) to Nature and natural realities is very basic to Indian religious and spiritual outlook. This is also the inspiration behind the well-known moral ideals of non-violence, i.e., *ahimsa*, to be practised in mind, word, and deed in relation to all creation. *Ahimsa*, though sounds negative in its verbal expression, is very positive in its meaning and signification; it represents the following virtuous practices: to be tender, serene, compassionate, kind, gentle, friendly, and to be attractive to others in charm and humour. These together constitute what is meant by *ahimsa* as the first of the two basic disciplines known as *yama* (the other being *niyama*) of the great *Astanga Yoga* of Patanjali of the great Indian spiritual heritage. Sri Buddha, Sri Krishna and Jesus Christ, Francis Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi and many other great personalities this Mother Earth had generated are epitomes of this great multi-faceted virtue called *ahimsa*.

Practice of *ahimsa* is not to be compromised with the western materialistic ideology of exploitation of Nature under the pretext of “progress and development.” The western industrialists, who have desecralised and irreparably polluted their geographical areas of this planet and profanely treated the natural environment by dumping atomic, chemical, and other toxic industrial wastes, have already started encroaching into the serene and clean environment of the developing nations, and they have already exploited, spoiled. They have polluted the living environment of millions people of the developing countries, endangering their lives, all under the tantalizing banner of “development and progress”! Is consumeristic development alone to be considered progressive? If it is, we are blindly led to the catastrophe of suffering from the “Poverty of the Spirit.” To confront this, we need appropriate planning and maintenance of *the values of sanity and sanctity as well as of saving and sharing*, in the true spirit of non-violence to Nature, the all-nurturing habitat, and to our own homes and their neat and tidy environments.

By way of an impartial observation about the domestic practice of *ahimsa* and its applied virtues in the environment of our homes, it seems that we should in a special way appreciate the daily routine of the family life of our devoted Hindu neighbours. Their daily worship in the domestic niche in front of their divine house patron (*I•adevata*) becomes the first spiritual duty of a householder; whereas sweeping the courtyard and other domestic premises, washing the portico, decorating the frontage floor with *rangoli* (a symbolic drawing) and the inner shrine with flowers and garlanding the images of the forefathers, *gurus*, and *chryas* are some of the initial spiritual duties of the wife of the householder and children. All other activities, either official or of daily routine, should proceed after these initial sacred rituals which to a great extent effect harmony with God, Nature, and ourselves in our homely habitat.

Thus, these actions at the domestic divine centres are constitutive of a holistic vision of life at home and it is closely related to the total spectrum of life of the families of our composite religio-spiritual culture of India. While respecting our particular religious denominational identities, we should share our common sacred family values, faith-motifs, social duties, neighbourly courtesy visits and other domestic etiquettes and hospitalities. Thus, living our daily life by sharing common cultural, religious, ethical, and spiritual values makes us feel happy with one another as fellow pilgrims making a common journey towards achieving some common good and welfare for all. This is in essence the holistic way of living while working for the common good of saving this planet for our posterity so that our children too play jovially on the courtyard of this Planet Earth.

The understanding is that if the house and its premises are clean, beautiful, and orderly, there would be certain homeliness because of which everybody feels at home and everybody feels that there is no place on the planet earth more lovable than one's own home. In fact, this is the most important factor that nurtures loving attitude to nature, to the universe as a whole, human beings as well as animals, vegetation and even the soil. A sense of respect for everything and everybody, according to a scale of preference based on the sense of the sacred, is derived from the awareness that this is a world enveloped and indwelt by the Divine Spirit. This awakens in a human person a certain *sense of mystery* that surrounds our living environment. Although not everything is crystal clear to every human being regarding the working of the Divine Spirit in this material

nature and its transformative process therein, yet something is in his/her grasp, physically and spiritually, mentally and environmentally. Wisdom sayings, like “Cleanliness is Godliness,” “Godliness is homeliness,” etc., are saturated guidelines for life. We humans should strive to live up to these spiritual ideals of ecological harmony, and this is in summary applying eco-friendly ethical principles to resolve both the local and global environmental crises.

12. Conclusion

In attempting to apply holistic ethical norms towards solving our contemporary environmental crises endangering our life and that of our fellow creatures on this planet, I derive the following conclusion: Everybody understands the extrinsic value of things of this world. But as rational spiritual beings, we must grow in sensitivity to see the ground value and intrinsic value of all things in their holistic co-relation and final intentionality in relation to our life on earth and its transcendental openness to the Wholeness of Reality which is beyond our ordinary perceptions and sensations. Polluting the environment is a social sin that many do not own up. Indeed, the very notion of pollution involves a moral judgment: a threat to some of our cherished values of happy life. Rules against pollution defend a specific social order, establishment of which is the responsibility of individuals as well as organisations and governments.

Eco-crisis is not just a scientific problem that can be solved merely by technological inventions. It is cultural, religious, and moral as well as social dimensions, affecting our sacred family life in an alarming way. Hence, it needs some ethical solutions, seasoned with a clear religious, moral and spiritual vision about our life to be lived in tune with the survival of this planet together with all other supporting life saving sub-structures and fellow beings of our planet, which was “blessed” and found “good” by the Creator for the birth and growth of all living beings, while the human beings are appointed its custodians, protectors, and preservers as the Bible and other great scriptures of all religions enlighten us.